

Rep. Buchanan's Columns from the 112th Congress:

1. [Tax Reform Can Bring Prosperity Back to America](#)
2. [Buchanan Bill Says NO to Cuba](#)
3. [Buchanan Bill Cracks Down on Illegal Pill Mills](#)

Tax Reform Can Bring Prosperity Back to America

By Congressman Vern Buchanan

The U.S. tax code today is complicated, unfair, and punishes everyone from families to employers trying to compete in the global marketplace. Instead of promoting economic growth and enhancing our international competitiveness, it does just the opposite. In short, it's hurting our economy.

The tax code consumes more than 71,000 pages and it gets longer all the time.

Individuals and families spend more than \$6 billion simply trying to file their tax returns, with more than 90 percent of our citizens forced to retain a paid tax preparer or utilize income tax software in order to meet their obligations.

It's so complex that even the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) commissioner cannot prepare his own tax return. How can middle-class families expect to comply with a tax code that the IRS commissioner finds too difficult?

The IRS says the average person spends 21.4 hours filling out tax forms. A USA Today editorial lampooned the complexity by noting that the instruction booklet for Apple's iPad is one page, while the instructions accompanying the IRS 1040 long form consume 172 pages.

And, the IRS has already announced that it is behind schedule for the upcoming April 15th filing deadline because the Congress and President waited until the waning days of last year before reaching agreement on legislation extending existing tax rates for another two years.

Calling our tax code "an anchor" around the neck of our people, our businesses, and our economy doesn't do justice to the enormous dead-weight it represents.

It's well past time for the Congress and President to put aside their respective political interests and work together on a major tax reform package. And, the guiding principle of this effort must be tax simplification.

Income tax compliance costs for the business sector exceed \$150 billion annually. Tax simplification can help create new jobs by allowing businesses to re-direct these funds for better usage.

Businesses won't waste this money attempting to comply with our broken-beyond-repair tax code, but rather dedicate these funds to design better products, expand their production facilities, or hire more workers.

Also, tax simplification will help U.S. businesses sell more services or goods to consumers around the world, and help led to renewed job creation and economic growth through higher export levels.

Finally, our businesses increasingly find themselves competing in a global marketplace, not just a North American or European marketplace. Increasingly, businesses from China and India are becoming more competitive with U.S. businesses.

Very shortly, the United States will have the highest corporate income tax rate among its key industrialized allies. This will shackle our businesses, as they attempt to compete globally with businesses that pay lower rates. Over the long term, this puts our business sector at a competitive disadvantage, which needs to be solved.

I call upon President Obama to make tax reform and simplification a high priority this year. He can and should outline his vision for a simpler, fairer, pro-growth tax code to the American people in his upcoming State of the Union speech.

Both parties in Congress should work together on a new tax code that creates jobs, revitalizes our economy, and helps America resume her rightful role as the leader of the global economy.

Buchanan Bill Says NO to Cuba

By Congressman Vern Buchanan

The economically impoverished nation of Cuba wants to drill for oil 50 miles from Florida's coast. If oil is found in commercially viable quantities, it would benefit Cuba, not the United States.

But the bigger problem is that Cuba, using Chinese-made equipment, wants to drill a well even deeper than BP's Deepwater Horizon that exploded last year in the Gulf of Mexico. Cuba has neither the resources nor the technology to handle a spill, and help from American companies would be greatly complicated by the trade embargo.

It would only take three days for a spill to reach our beaches. And if disaster strikes, who pays the price? Not Cuba or China – but America. The economic and environmental damage would be catastrophic.

We cannot allow this project to move forward.

Last week, I introduced legislation (H.R. 372) aimed at blocking Cuba from drilling so close to our shores. Obviously we can't tell Cuba what to do since we don't have diplomatic relations with that country. So my legislation would attack the problem by allowing the U.S. Interior Secretary to deny American oil permits to any company that does business with an embargoed nation, like Cuba. A Spanish firm, Repsol, is now working with Cuba and hopes to begin drilling later this year. Repsol also has 20 drilling permits awaiting approval for projects in the Gulf of Mexico. My bill essentially tells Repsol to decide whether it wants to continue doing business with Cuba or with the United States.

Current law prohibits off-shore drilling within 125 miles of Florida's coast. The reason Cuba can drill so close is that the island nation's territorial waters extend to 50 miles off the Florida Keys. U.S. companies have the best deep-water equipment, but cannot participate in the Cuban drilling because of the 45-year economic embargo against Fidel Castro's communist regime.

Repsol's oil platform for Cuba is now being built in China and would be transported by sea to begin operating off the Florida coast later this year. As we have learned from the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, an oil spill can devastate a regional economy and impose serious long-term environmental damage to precious natural resources.

Facing pressure from the United States several years ago, Repsol scrapped plans to build a gas development plant in Iran. It's my expectation that Repsol would take similar action and abandon its contract with Cuba if my legislation is passed.

The proposed oil well would drill 5,600 feet, which would exceed BP's 5,000-foot well at Deepwater Horizon. Quickly capping a blown well at that depth would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. We need to do everything possible to prevent another Deepwater Horizon from ever happening again.

Buchanan Bill Cracks Down on Illegal Pill Mills

Florida "Ground Zero" in Prescription Drug Battle

By Congressman Vern Buchanan

A parent's worst nightmare is having to bury a child. That nightmare is becoming a tragic reality for far too many families in Florida.

On average, seven people die from prescription drug abuse every day in Florida. These are not just numbers.

Garrett Harney's last words of despair to his mother were "Mom, I can't be helped." Garrett

overdosed on oxycontin and xanax in 2006. His mother, a Sarasota resident, is now trying to help save lives by spreading the important message that prescription drug abuse is a deadly serious problem in Florida.

I held a public forum in Sarasota last week to discuss ways to combat the growing threat of illegal "Pill Mills." These so-called "pain management" clinics are nothing more than drug dealers posing as doctors and health providers. They have turned Florida into the nation's warehouse for narcotics. Florida has more pain clinics than McDonald's restaurants.

As a result of what I heard from families and law enforcement authorities who attended my public forum, as well as my discussions with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and others, I have drafted legislation to put these Pill Mills out of business and make our communities safer again.

My three-point bill to be introduced next week in the U.S. House of Representatives will do the following:

- Toughen federal penalties for Pill Mill operators by doubling the prison sentence from 10 to 20 years and tripling the fine from \$1 million to \$3 million.
- Use assets seized from violators to fund drug monitoring databases in the states, enforce actions against Pill Mills; and for drug treatment programs. The DEA last month seized an estimated \$2.5 million in illicit assets owned by Pill Mill owners in South Florida.
- Reclassify hydrocodone combination drugs (one of the most addictive and dangerous drug mixtures) to make them a Schedule II drug that is more difficult to prescribe and obtain.

I support a state drug database approved by the Florida Legislature that would allow us to track these narcotics and identify abusive practices. Florida's prescription drug epidemic has exploded upon us in just a few short years due to the proliferation of an estimated 1,300 Pill Mills.

The cost of this epidemic is enormous. Lower employee productivity. Higher emergency room diagnostic and treatment costs. The high cost of drug addiction treatment itself. The \$15,000 - \$20,000 in costs to treat addicted babies in neonatal intensive care. The \$1.4 million in lifetime costs that addicts incur. Rising health insurance premiums to pay for uncompensated care. The burden on taxpayers and society is staggering.

My legislation attacks the root of this problem – Pill Mills. The first responsibility of government is to protect its people from harm. While there may be sharp differences of opinion about the ever-growing role of government in the 21st Century, I think we would all agree that shutting down these Pill Mills, and the pain they have caused countless families and the costs they have passed along to the rest of us, should be a high priority.

And we can achieve this goal without appropriating new money or expanding government. Everyone benefits. Except the drug dealers posing as health care providers.